

Early Vancouver

Volume One

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2011 Edition (Originally Published 1932)

Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1931-1932.

*A Collection of Historical Data, Maps, and Plans Made with the Assistance of
Pioneers of Vancouver Between March and December 1931.*

About the 2011 Edition

The 2011 edition is a transcription of the original work collected and published by Major Matthews. Handwritten marginalia and corrections Matthews made to his text over the years have been incorporated and some typographical errors have been corrected, but no other editorial work has been undertaken. The edition and its online presentation was produced by the City of Vancouver Archives to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the City's founding. The project was made possible by funding from the Vancouver Historical Society.

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“That was how it was,” continued Colonel Worsnop.

Colonel Worsnop had served in the North West Rebellion with the “Little Black Devils” (90th Regiment) of Winnipeg, a rifle regiment, which would explain in part his preference for the rifle uniform. One has but to refer to the history of the Rifle Brigade to gather why H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught was thought of as Honorary Colonel.

J.S. Matthews

18 OCTOBER 1931 – 7TH BATTALION, CANADIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE. LIEUTENANT COLONEL W. HART-McHARG.

“I can’t understand Hulme,” Major W. Hart-McHarg is reported to have said while in Vancouver, just before leaving for the front with the first contingent from Vancouver to the Great War. “I don’t know why he doesn’t jump at the opportunity. As for me, I have but a couple of years or so to live, and ...” but he did not finish the sentence.

The above incident was related to me by Captain W.H. Forrest, paymaster of the 6th Regiment D.C.O.R., in which Colonel Hulme was officer commanding, Major Hart-McHarg second in command, and myself a company commander. He told it to me after the War, shortly before he died about 1920. Captain Forrest and Major McHarg were close friends; both were renowned rifle shots, and said that the conversation took place just after Colonel Hulme had declined or waived the command, to which as senior officer of his regiment he was entitled, of the first troops to leave Vancouver for the Great War.

But what Colonel Hart-McHarg did not take into consideration was that Colonel Hulme was a man of much judgment, a splendid soldier, and a man who throughout his life would rather serve others than serve himself. He, himself, had no war experience, while right at his hand was an experienced officer, one who had served as a sergeant in South Africa, a man of influence, dignity, ability, and held in the highest respect by all ranks of soldiers and civilians. It was a great sacrifice for Colonel Hulme, a sacrifice for which he has never had credit, in fact, a sacrifice for which he has been blamed by men of lesser reasoning, who asserted that he sidestepped a responsibility. Then again, Colonel Hulme was a barrister with responsibilities to clients which he could not drop at a moment’s notice; he had a wife and three small children. Colonel Hart-McHarg was also a barrister, but he had partners, and was a single man, and had often left his practice for trips abroad. What Colonel Hulme should receive is our plaudits for his selection of Colonel McHarg.

J.S. Matthews

19 OCTOBER 1931 - THE “JUNGLE” OF 1931. HASTINGS SAWMILL. VANCOUVER HARBOUR COMMISSION AND COLONEL R.D. WILLIAMS.

It was a warm heart on a wet day, and Colonel Williams, which started that remarkable humanitarian haven for the destitute and distressed men—many of them splendid specimens, and fully half veterans of the Great War—which spontaneously grew up on the old Hastings Sawmill site during the spring of 1931, and existed throughout the summer until about September. By a strange whim of fate, this odd collection of crude habitations sprung up on that most historic site, the bare scene where once stood the first important settlement on Burrard Inlet, the Hastings Mill, now no more, once the terminus of the historic road, a mere slit in the forest, which led to and from New Westminster and civilisation.

Today the great transcontinental road, the Canadian Pacific Railway passes through it before finally reaching its Pacific terminus a half a mile further on, and it is, or was, this fact which contributed to the establishment of the “Jungle.” Hundreds of forlorn men in search of work were, during 1931, “beating” their way backwards and forwards, first east, then west, on the car roads, in search of work, and as the freight trains passed into the terminals of Vancouver they dropped off at convenient points, this particular one being a popular dropping off point.

This is the story of one of our 1930 "Jungles."

One wretched afternoon in the spring of 1931, the rain fell in torrents and ran in streams down the window panes of the old Hastings Sawmill office, now used as the Vancouver Harbour Commission headquarters. Colonel R.D. Williams, a busy business man and administrator, one of the three harbour commissioners, rose from his polished desk in a sumptuously furnished office to witness the burst of the heavens, and reached the window just in time to see the legs of a man disappear under a pile of rails which lay on the C.P.R. right of way just east of Dunlevy Avenue. The rails were stacked four or five high; adjoining was that vacant area formerly used as the Hastings Sawmill lumber yard. The men had added some paper in sheets to add to the protection from the elements afforded by the rails.

Colonel Williams afterwards related to me, much as follows:

"It was a shocking afternoon, the rain came down in sheets. Through the window I saw a man disappear under some rails, put on my coat, and went out into the storm to investigate. I stooped down, and looked under the rails, and saw what seemed to be several men sheltering under there. I called out to them, and finally enquired if any were returned soldiers. One replied, 'yes,' so I told him to come on out of there, and he came. He told me he had been a bugler in the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, the P.P.C.L.I.'s. After I had fished him out, I discovered there were thirteen more under there, and two of them were without boots.

"I pointed to those two wooden sheds you see over there on the shore, and told the bugler to take charge of the party. We had a stove down at the La Pointe Pier, so I sent over and got that, and then went round and bought canned milk, tea, sugar, and some bread and tobacco.

"Then we sent the men over to the fish wharf; you know, the commission operates a fish wharf; the fishermen over there gave them three ten-pound salmon. We got a few potatoes, brought the cook stove up, set it up, and started housekeeping with Bugler Hilton in charge.

"The fourteen men had no sooner moved out from the rail pile than more went under, and we had the whole situation duplicated again.

"Then the thing began to grow, and as they grew the men began to steal the grain doors which come in on the grain cars, and they took some iron they should not have taken—to make shelters—and a few more men came, and then still more, and finally the thing grew too big for Hilton, so I took Policeman Walters from the Ballantyne Pier, and put him in charge as a sort of majordomo, and to maintain law and order.

"Finally, the thing got a little too big even for him, so the office staff took charge, and undertook to run the 'show' in their spare time. Some of my personal friends took an interest; I think I must have clothed thirty men with the clothes which were sent to me to distribute. Mrs. Eric W. Hamber took a very great interest, and one day sent down two dozen pairs of boots, two dozen each of suits of underwear, socks, shirts, and ten pounds of tobacco. The fishermen over at the first wharf were very good all through the existence of the 'Jungle,' and always gave what they could spare.

"As the thing began to get bigger, all three Harbour Commissioners began to take a private and personal interest, and one day a ton of potatoes was mysteriously found in the basement of the office, and the strange thing was that that ton of potatoes was akin to the oatmeal of the barrel in the Bible—there were always more potatoes; in fact, altogether there must have been several tons. The fisherman at the wharf sent over fish every day; P. Burns and Company sent meat; Captain Binks came down one day with ten dollars worth of cigarettes; the Vancouver Club sent ten gallons of soup every morning, Sundays included, and all the bread and rolls and buns left over from the day. Once a week, sometimes twice, and oftener, the Terminal City Club sent down hot mulligan.

"We lined up all returned men for first choice as soon as the stuff arrived, then the men who had registered came next, and the rest followed. Every morning when the soup came down we lined them up in a ragged column on the boardwalk. The issue was a bowl of soup, one third of a loaf of bread, a piece of soap, and some cigarettes. By this time the 'thing' was getting too extensive

for Hilton, and afterwards for Walters, so our own office staff took charge. They were a quiet, orderly lot; one was a graduate of Cambridge University. The men themselves cleared out the 'Reds.'"

How? I asked.

"Beat them up," was the blunt response Colonel Williams gave.

He continued. "We had the usual sanitary arrangements of a military camp, with the added advantages of running water for proper latrines and for washing purposes.

"Thus it went on until a case of typhoid developed, and we had to take the patient to the General Hospital. Then the health authorities of the city stepped in, and we had to close up the 'encampment.' A body of workmen were sent down, and the whole 'Jungle' was warned to collect their belongings and clear out, and the improvised hutments, a nondescript collection of wonderfully unique architecture; old boards, sheet iron, packing cases and what not, went up in flames. Besides, the winter was coming on, and the rain was beginning. Summer was over.

"Had it not ended as it did, we have in mind getting tents from the Department of National Defense and setting up a tented camp.

"We started with fourteen; it rose to a peak of two hundred and forty, but the average roll was one hundred and sixty.

"One particularly gratifying thing was that at the conclusion the men presented the Harbour Commissioners with a rude testimonial, drawn up on a sheet of plan foils, and signed by approximately one hundred men, expressing their thanks and gratitude."

J.S. Matthews

Note: a copy of the testimonial together with a number of photographs of the "Jungle" are preserved in the City Archives Room.

19 OCTOBER 1931 - KITSILANO. ST. MARK'S CHURCH. BISHOP SOVEREIGN, B.D.

Bishop-elect Sovereign, now of St. Mark's Church (Anglican), 2nd Avenue West, Kitsilano, soon to be created Bishop of the Yukon, told me today in a conversation at his rectory, 2436 West 2nd Avenue, that when he first went to St. Mark's Church as its first rector, the whole area of land surrounding was a wilderness (1909). A single-track street railway on what had in the early days been the C.P.R. railway to English Bay ran to Kitsilano Beach, and from there the church was reached by a convenient trail, the remains of an old logging road which ran from the street car terminus on the beach diagonally across the land until it reached near the church. At night a lantern was carried when traversing the old trail.

There was but one road in Kitsilano then, the sinuous Point Grey Road, part of which is now known as First Avenue West. Point Grey Road was a narrow trail, a buggy's width wide, lined with small bushes, and with mud deep to the axles. It ran as far as Dunbar, and then turned south into the forest.

All that section west of Trafalgar Street was covered with trees, the larger of which had been taken out by loggers. Mrs. J.Z. Hall had a clearing in the bush, approached by a trail which led from Point Grey Road, where she and her family spent the summers. They had two cows, a garden, a Chinese helper, and a little pool for bathing in the creek. The little girls were not allowed to go too far away when picking blueberries which grew wild, for fear of the bears in the woods. (Photo of this clearing is in the Archives.)

East of the church there was nothing until Vine Street was reached; that street was the limit of civilisation.